VIRGINIA
HEALTH CARE
FOUNDATION

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Virginia Health Care Foundation Grant of $100,000 Will Underwrite 100 Denture Units at Mission of Mercy (MOM) in Wise County This Weekend and Expand MOM Services

RICHMOND, VA – In response to the significant and growing need for dental services for uninsured adults in the Commonwealth, the Virginia Health Care Foundation (*VHCF*) announces a special $100,000 initiative in partnership with the Virginia Dental Association Foundation (*VDAF*) to expand oral health services delivered through VDAF's Mission of Mercy (*MOM*) projects.

This multi-pronged initiative will help underwrite MOM projects in six new Virginia communities over the next three years; upgrade equipment, which will improve services at MOMs; and pilot an innovative, low-cost denture product that will make 100 denture units available to 50-75 people at the MOM project in Wise County in this weekend.

MOMs are temporary dental clinics (*1-3 days*) staffed by a large cadre of dental and lay volunteers and VCU dental students who converge on a community over a weekend, and join with local dentists to provide dental care to the area's uninsured. Typically utilizing about 250 volunteers, a MOM project can treat 500 patients in one day.

If the past 49 MOM projects are indicative, extractions will be the most sought-after service this weekend. "We offer teeth cleaning and restorations (*filling cavities*),

too," said Terry Dickinson, Executive Director of VDAF, and the founder of MOM projects. "Unfortunately, by the time people come to see us, many are experiencing pain or their teeth are beyond repair. Extractions are their only recourse."

Some people just need one or two teeth removed. A surprising number lose multiple teeth. "Last year at the Wise MOM, 296 people had five or more teeth extracted," said Debbie Oswalt, VHCF Executive Director. "That's 22 percent of all the patients! Over 130 of them had 10 or more teeth extracted."

Once a person loses so many teeth, dentures are necessary, but have been limited for MOM patients, because they are time-consuming and expensive to produce. Last year, only 31 Wise patients were lucky enough to obtain them. "There are 500 former MOM patients currently on a waiting list for full or partial dentures," said Dickinson.

"It is the cruelest irony that people lose their teeth because they can't afford to go to the dentist, and then they need dentures, which are even more expensive than regular dental visits," remarked Oswalt. "We have all been exploring ways to provide affordable, quality dentures to MOM patients," she continued, "And were delighted when VDAF asked us to underwrite a pilot project at the Wise County MOM which uses an innovative, low-cost approach to producing dentures. If it all works out, we hope to make the dentures available to all dental safety net programs throughout Virginia."

Nearly half of all Virginians have no dental insurance. For many, regular visits to the dentist are an expensive luxury they can't afford, competing with essential household expenses like food and rent. In communities without permanent dental safety net services, MOMs are sometimes the only option for the uninsured who seek treatment.

"VHCF has been an engaged and helpful partner to the Virginia Dental Association for the past twelve years, when it provided the funds to equip our very first MOM project," said Dickinson. "We are grateful to VHCF for its help in expanding and enhancing our MOM projects, and the Commonwealth's dental safety net."

VHCF is the largest single funder of dental safety net programs in Virginia. Over the past 13 years, it has invested more than $7 million to help establish and expand 37 of the state's 75 community-based dental safety net programs.

The Virginia Health Care Foundation is a non-profit public/private partnership with the mission of increasing access to primary health care for uninsured and medically underserved Virginians. The Foundation was initiated by the General Assembly and its Joint Commission on Health Care in 1992. Since its inception, it has funded 335 community-based projects across the Commonwealth, and its programs and partnerships have touched the lives of more than 600,000 uninsured Virginians.

For more information about VHCF and its programs, visit www.vhcf.org or call (804) 828-5804.

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